

BEWARE OF BRENNAN MANNING

Updated June 26, 2008 (first published April 1, 2008) (David Cloud, Fundamental Baptist Information Service, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061, 866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org; for instructions about subscribing and unsubscribing or changing addresses, see the information paragraph at the end of the article) -

Brennan Manning has a large and growing influence among evangelicals.

His book “The Ragamuffin Gospel,” first came to my attention as I was researching contemporary Christian music in 1998 in preparation for the publication of *Contemporary Christian Music under the Spotlight*. Some of the most influential CCM musicians are mightily impressed with *The Ragamuffin Gospel*. Notable among these are Michael W. Smith (who wrote the foreword to *The Ragamuffin Gospel*), Michael Card (who named his oldest son after the author of *The Ragamuffin Gospel*), and the late Rich Mullins (who formed the Ragamuffin Band).

The book is published by Multnomah Press, the printing arm of Multnomah College of the Bible, an alleged evangelical institution.

His books have been recommended by Philip Yancey, Eugene Peterson, Larry Crabb, Michael Card, Michael W. Smith, the members of U2, and many others.

He has spoken at Christian & Missionary Alliance conferences, Vineyard conferences, and many similar forums.

In 2005 *Christianity Today* called “The Ragamuffin Gospel” a “spiritual classic.” Yet after they published the article “A Coward Who Stayed to Help,” which was Manning’s story of his alleged heroics assisting victims during the Hurricane Katrina disaster, they had to publish a retraction five days later stating that Manning had lied. In a voice message to *Christianity Today* he blithely said, “The essential truth: I lied” (“Brennan Manning, Featured Speaker” James Sundquist, June 24, 2007).

Manning has published a dozen or more popular books in addition to *The Ragamuffin Gospel*, including *Abba’s Child: The Cry of the Heart for Intimate Belonging* (Navpress, 1994), *The Signature of Jesus* (Multnomah, 1996), *The Boy Who Cried Abba: A Parable of Trust and Acceptance* (1998, 2001), *Reflections for Ragamuffins* (1998), *A Ruthless Trust: The Ragamuffin’s Path to God* (2000), *The Wisdom of Tenderness* (2002), *The Journey of the Prodigal* (2002), *The Wisdom of Tenderness: What Happens When God’s Fierce Mercy Transforms Our Lives* (2002), *The Rabbi’s Heartbeat* (Navpress, 2003), *Posers, Fakers, and Wannabes: Unmasking the Real You* (Navpress, 2003), *A Glimpse of Jesus: The Stranger to Self-Hatred* (2003), *Above All: He Took the Fall and Thought of Me* (2003), *Lion and Lamb: The Relentless Tenderness of Jesus* (Revell, 2004).

WHO IS MANNING?

Manning's (b. 1934) birth name was Richard Francis Xavier Manning. In 1963 he was ordained to the Franciscan priesthood. In the late 1960s he joined the Little Brothers of Jesus of Charles de Foucauld in Spain. This Order spends its days in manual labor serving poor communities and its nights "wrapped in silence and prayer." He spent six months in solitary contemplation in a remote cave in a desert. In the 1970s he returned to the States and eventually entered a six month treatment program for alcoholism. In 1982 he got married and left the priesthood.

MANNING'S FOUNDATIONAL ERROR IS HIS FALSE GOSPEL

His web site features his biography, and what is glaringly absent is any scriptural testimony of salvation. Instead, we find the following statement:

"In February 1956, while Brennan was meditating on the Stations of the Cross, a powerful experience of the personal love of Jesus Christ sealed the call of God on his life."

There is no repentance, no scriptural new birth, merely a "sealing" of that which began at his infant baptism. Further, the Jesus of the Stations of the Cross is Rome's false christ, a christ who was assisted in his suffering by his mother and other women.

Though Manning is no longer a priest, he continues to participate in and promote the blasphemous Catholic mass. When he is in his home in New Orleans he attends the morning daily mass at the Holy Spirit Catholic Church.

Manning preaches a false antinomian, Roman-tinged, psychology-influenced gospel. He believes a person can be saved and continue to live in the grossest sin without repentance. Following Rome's pattern, Manning's gospel glosses over the basis for salvation, which is the blood and death of Jesus Christ (even while giving it lip service), and ignores the necessity of the new birth. Manning uses biblical terms but he redefines them, giving them unbiblical meanings. His writings are filled with half truths and statements of truth followed by contradictions to those statements.

Manning continually quotes from and unquestioningly affirms the writings of false teachers such as Paul Tillich (an adulterous neo-orthodox theologian), Carl Jung (who wrote under the guidance of a demon and who considered Christianity a myth), Beatrice Bruteau (a proponent of the New Age "I am god" heresy), Henri Nouwen (who believed men can be saved apart from faith in Christ), Thomas Merton (a Buddhist-Catholic), Teresa of Avila, Pierre Teilhard (pantheistic Jesuit mystic), Thomas Aquinas and "St." Augustine (doctors of the Catholic Church), and Dietrich Bonhoeffer (a father of neo-orthodoxy).

Manning says, “To evangelize a person is to say to him or her: you, too, are loved by God in the Lord Jesus” (*The Ragamuffin Gospel*, 2nd edition, 2000, p. 120).

This is not the gospel and it is not scriptural evangelism. While it is certainly true that God loves sinners, that is only a part of the story; God is also holy and will judge every infraction of His law. The biblical gospel begins with the bad news of man’s fallen condition and his guilt and only when the sinner acknowledges this and repents and puts his trust exclusively in Jesus Christ can he experience God’s love in a saving manner. In the book of Romans, Paul dwelt on God’s holiness and wrath and man’s lost condition for nearly three chapters before he got to the good news of the offer of salvation in Christ (Romans 1:18- 3:25).

Manning says, “God is a kooky God who can scarcely bear to be without us” (*The Ragamuffin Gospel*, p. 165).

It is blasphemous to describe God as “kooky.” And if His love means He can “scarcely bear to be without us,” what is eternal Hell all about? Jesus frequently warned about Hell, and stated, in fact, that most sinners will go there. “*Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it*” (Mat. 7:13-14).

Writing about the woman in John 8 who was caught in adultery, Manning says that Jesus “didn’t demand a firm purpose of amendment” and “didn’t seem too concerned that she might dash back into the arms of her lover” (*The Ragamuffin Gospel*, 1990, p. 167).

To the contrary, Jesus commanded her, “Go, and sin no more” (Jn. 8:11). Similarly, after Jesus healed the crippled man in John 5 He instructed him, “Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee” (Jn. 5:14).

Manning mentions in particular some people that he has met: a female prostitute, a woman who had an abortion, and a male homosexual (*Ragamuffin*, pp. 32-33). He claims that all of these are saved even though they justify their sin and have no intention of turning from it. The apostle Paul addressed Manning’s error in 1 Corinthians 6:9-13:

“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such WERE some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body.”

The church members at Corinth had lived in all sorts of wicked lives before they were saved, but after they believed on Christ they were changed, and Paul warned them about going back to the old life. He warned them, in particular, about fornication. The gospel of Christ teaches that sinners are saved by God's grace without works, but it also teaches that those who are saved are saved "unto good works" (Ephesians 2:8-10).

The apostle John taught: "HE THAT SAITH, I KNOW HIM, AND KEEPETH NOT HIS COMMANDMENTS, IS A LIAR, AND THE TRUTH IS NOT IN HIM" (1 John 2:4).

Manning says:

"Something is radically wrong when the local church rejects a person accepted by Jesus: when a harsh, judgmental and unforgiving sentence is passed on homosexuals; when a divorcee is denied communion; when the child of a prostitute is refused baptism; when an unlaicized priest is forbidden the sacraments" (*The Ragamuffin Gospel*, p. 30).

There is a world of confusion and doctrinal error in this one statement. First, the Scriptures instruct churches to reject those who claim to be saved but who live in gross sin (1 Corinthians 5). Second, Manning assumes that judging things by God's Word is "harsh" and "unforgiving" but this certainly does not have to be the case. The Bible instructs believers to "*prove all things*" (1 Thess. 5:21), commends the Bereans for searching the Scripture daily to see "*whether those things were so*" (Acts 17:11), and says, "... *he that is spiritual judgeth all things*" (1 Cor. 2:15). Third, Manning claims that forgiveness should be given whether or not there is repentance on the part of the sinner, but the Bible says there is no forgiveness without repentance (Lk. 13:3, 5; Acts 17:30; 20:21; 26:20; 2 Cor. 7:9-10; 2 Pet. 3:9). Jesus said, "... *except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish*" (Lk. 13:3). Fourth, the Bible says the saved person is changed. "*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new*" (2 Cor. 5:17). Fifth, Manning teaches the heresy of infant baptism, whereas the Bible says baptism is for believers only (Mk. 16:15). Sixth, Manning defends the Catholic priesthood, whereas the New Testament says every believer is a priest in Christ (1 Peter 2:5, 9). Seventh, Manning defends the unscriptural Catholic sacraments even though they have no support in the Scripture and they teach a works salvation.

Manning even claims that those who take the mark of the Beast will be saved.

"And he [Christ] will say to us: 'Vile beings, you who are in the image of the beast and bear his mark, but come all the same, you as well'" (*The Ragamuffin Gospel*, p. 21).

To the contrary, the book of Revelation plainly states that all who take the mark of the Beast will suffer in Hell.

"And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine

of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name” (Rev. 14:9-11).

MANNING PROMOTES EASTERN MYSTICISM

In *The Signature of Jesus* Manning promotes the dangerous practice of centering prayer, which involves chanting “a sacred word” to empty the mind and allegedly enter into silent experiential communion with God within:

“[T]he first step in faith is to stop thinking about God at the time of prayer. ... enter into the great silence of God. Alone in that silence, the noise within will subside and the Voice of Love will be heard. ... Choose a single, sacred word ... repeat the sacred word inwardly, slowly, and often” (pp. 212, 215, 218).

Manning also encourages the use of mantras and emptying the mind in *The Ragamuffin Gospel*. He instructs Christians to repeat an eight-word mantra (“The Lord is my Shepherd, I lack nothing”) for 10 minutes. He says:

“The first step toward rejuvenation begins with accepting where you are and exposing your poverty, frailty, and emptiness to the love that is everything. Don’t try to feel anything, think anything, or do anything ... Don’t force prayer. Simply relax in the presence of the God you half believe in and ask for a touch of folly” (*The Ragamuffin Gospel*, p. 196).

This is as close as Manning comes to describing how to receive the gospel, and it is unscriptural in every aspect. The Bible does not invite the sinner to relax in the presence of God and *half* believe; it commands him to repent and to believe fully from the heart. The model for our faith is Abraham, who was not weak in faith (Rom. 4:19) and who “staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief” (Rom. 4:20).

Manning suggests that the sinner does not need to think anything. To the contrary, the Bible says he must believe the gospel, which is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ for our sins (1 Cor. 15:1-4). Paul said, “By which also ye are saved, IF YE KEEP IN MEMORY what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain” (1 Cor. 15:2). If one would be saved, there is a lot to think about!

In Romans 6:17 Paul described salvation as obeying from the heart a form of doctrine:

“But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.”

To obey a form of doctrine in one's heart involves thinking about it and consciously accepting it and believing it.

Manning promotes the dangerous practice of visualization, instructing people to visualize what Jesus might have looked like (p. 197). This is vain idolatry. No man knows what Jesus looked like, and if I visualize what I THINK He looked like I am creating my own idol. Further, to use one's imagination in this way is to invite demonic influence.

Manning promotes silent meditation. As noted earlier, he once spent six months in isolation in a cave in Spain. He meditates in silence each day. He spends eight days a year at a Jesuit retreat center in Colorado during which he speaks only 45 minutes each day. His spiritual director is a Dominican nun.

Manning claims to receive visions and special messages from God through his meditative practices.

IT APPEARS THAT MANNING BELIEVES IN UNIVERSALISM AND THE DIVINITY OF MAN

In *Abba's Child*, Manning wrote:

“[I]f I find Christ, I will find my true self and if I find my true self, I will find Christ” (Manning, *Abba's Child*, p. 125).

This is not the biblical Christ; it is the New Age “christ” who is in (or can be in) every man.

In *Abba's Child*, Manning recommends the writings of Beatrice Bruteau. She is the founder of The School for Contemplation and believes that God is within every human being. She says that each person can say, “I AM,” which is a name for Almighty God. She said:

“We have realized ourselves as the Self that says only I AM, with no predicate following, not ‘I am a this’ or ‘I have that quality.’ Only unlimited, absolute I AM” (Interview with Bruteau, *A Song That Goes on Singing*, quoted from <http://www.lighthouse trailsresearch.com/manning.htm>).

I AM, of course, is one of the biblical names of God. Why would Manning recommend Bruteau with no warning if he does not agree with this blasphemy?

In *The Signature of Jesus*, Manning gives this quote from the mystic Catholic priest William Shannon and the Catholic Buddhist Thomas Merton:

“During a conference on contemplative prayer, the question was put to Thomas Merton: ‘How can we best help people to attain union with God?’ His answer was very clear: WE MUST TELL THEM THAT THEY ARE ALREADY UNITED WITH GOD. CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER IS

NOTHING OTHER THAN COMING INTO CONSCIOUSNESS OF WHAT IS ALREADY THERE” (p. 218).

Merton was a Trappist monk who promoted the integration of Zen Buddhism and Christianity. The titles of some of his books are “Zen and the Birds of the Appetite” and “Mystics and the Zen Masters.”

Shannon was very bold in his rejection of the God of the Bible:

“This is a typical patriarchal notion of God. He is the God of Noah who sees people deep in sin, repents that He made them and resolves to destroy them. He is the God of the desert who sends snakes to bite His people because they murmured against Him. He is the God of David who practically decimates a people. ... He is the God who exacts the last drop of blood from His Son, so that His just anger, evoked by sin, may be appeased. This God whose moods alternate between graciousness and fierce anger. THIS GOD DOES NOT EXIST” (William Shannon, *Silence on Fire*, pp. 109, 110).

In *The Ragamuffin Gospel* Manning says:

“Nevertheless, the central affirmation of the Reformation stands: through no merit of ours, but by his mercy, we have been restored to a right relationship with God through the life, death, and resurrection of his beloved Son. This is the Good News, the gospel of Grace” (p. 18).

That is not the gospel of grace; that is the gospel of unconditional universalism. The true gospel is that whosoever believes in Christ will be saved (John 3:16), but Manning claims that men are already redeemed. He says, “We HAVE BEEN restored.”

Manning quotes David Steindl-Rast approvingly in *The Signature of Jesus* (pp. 210, 213-214). Steindl-Rast, a contemplative Roman Catholic priest, said: “Envision the great religious traditions arranged on the circumference of a circle. At their mystical core they all say the same thing, but with different emphasis” (“Heroic Virtue,” *Gnosis*, Summer 1992).

Manning quotes Matthew Fox approvingly in two of his books, *Lion and Lamb* (p. 135) and *A Stranger to Self Hatred* (pp. 113, 124). Fox says:

“God is a great underground river, and there are many wells into that river. There’s a Taoist well, a Buddhist well, a Jewish well, a Muslim well, a Christian well, a Goddess well, the Native wells-many wells that humans have dug to get into that river, but friends, there’s only one river; the living waters of wisdom” (quoted from John Caddock, “What Is Contemplative Spirituality,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, Autumn 1997).

Since Manning gives glowing recommendations for these people and offers no warning to his readers about their universalism it appears that he holds the same heresy.

In His books *The Signature of God* and *Gentle Revolutionaries* Manning describes a dream he has had about judgment day. He sees Adolf Hitler and Hugh Hefner (founder of *Playboy* magazine) and himself and others going before God to be judged, but God just takes them by the hand and walks them home. The implication is that everyone is accepted by God through grace, regardless of whether they repent and believe the gospel and have a born again experience.

MANNING MOCKS A STRONG BIBLICAL POSITION

He warns about “the Bible thumper” (*The Ragamuffin Gospel*, p. 36).

He says:

“I am deeply distressed by what I only can call in our Christian culture the idolatry of the Scriptures. For many Christians, the Bible is not a pointer to God but God himself. In a word--bibliolatry ... I develop a nasty rash around people who speak as if mere scrutiny of its pages will reveal precisely how God thinks and precisely what God wants” (*The Signature of Jesus*).

Bible believers don’t worship the Bible, but they do accept it for what it claims to be, the very Word of God, and they know therefore that they will find on its pages precisely how God thinks!

Manning warns about “academicians who would imprison Jesus in the ivory tower of exegesis” (*The Ragamuffin Gospel*, p. 14). Thus, after the fashion of the theological modernist Manning sets up the authority of Jesus over against that of the Bible, ignoring the fact that we know nothing for certain about Jesus and His doctrine apart from the Bible.

MANNING PROMOTES AN ECUMENICAL, TOLERANT DOCTRINAL POSITION

He says we should “listen to people in other denominations and religions” and we shouldn’t “find demons in those with whom we disagree” (*The Ragamuffin Gospel*, p. 65).

In emerging church fashion, Manning warns against being “either-or” and opts rather for the mythical “both-and.” He says:

“If we are open, we rarely resort to either-or, either creation or evolution, liberty or law, sacred or secular, Beethoven or Madonna. We focus on both-and, fully aware that God’s truth cannot be imprisoned in a small definition.... But the open mind realizes that reality, truth, and Jesus Christ are incredibly open-ended” (p. 65).

It is obvious that Manning has a different religion from that of the Lord’s apostles, who were incredibly dogmatic. The apostle John, for example, said: “*And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness*” (1 John 5:19). From the perspective of the mushy, can’t-be-

pinned-down-on-anything Christianity of Brennan Manning, 1 John 5:19 is incredibly narrow-minded and wrongheaded, but I will gladly take my stand with the Lord's apostles.

Note, too, Manning's openness to the most extreme forms of worldliness, as exemplified by his recommendation of Madonna, "The Material Girl."

MANNING IS SUPPORTIVE OF THE HOMOSEXUAL AGENDA

As we have seen, Manning believes that homosexuals should be accepted and not required to repent of their sin. He identifies "homophobia" as "among the most serious and vexing moral issues of this generation" (*Abba's Child*).

A phobia is an unreasonable fear of something, in this case, homosexuality. Thus, Manning would have us believe that those who reject homosexuality as immoral and who do not want homosexuals to influence society, who oppose their filthy parades and "marriages," have some sort of psychological illness. In fact, according to Manning, one of the most serious moral issues of our day is the rejection of homosexuality on the part of Bible believers.

To be consistent, Manning must lump Paul into the "homophobic" camp, because he strongly condemned homosexuality. Consider what Paul said about it:

"For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet" (Rom. 1:26-27).

MANNING DENIES THE SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT OF JESUS CHRIST

He writes:

"[T]he god whose moods alternate between graciousness and fierce anger ... the god who exacts the last drop of blood from his Son so that his just anger, evoked by sin, may be appeased, is not the God revealed by and in Jesus Christ. And if he is not the God of Jesus, he does not exist" (Brennan Manning, *Above All*, p. 58-59; the foreword to this book is written by CCM artist Michael W. Smith).

Manning boldly states that the God that required a blood sacrifice is an idol, but throughout the Old Testament we are taught that "*it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul*" (Lev. 17:11) and "*without shedding of blood is no remission*" (Heb. 9:22). Jesus Christ fulfilled all of the Old Testament blood sacrifices when He came and died on Calvary. John the Baptist said, "*Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world*" (John 1:29). Hebrews says:

“Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us” (Heb. 9:12).

In reality, it is Manning’s god of unconditional love that is the nonexistent idol.

The following is an important observation about Manning by John Caddock:

“There is a seductive quality to his writings. He reports grappling with and overcoming fear, guilt, and psychological hang-ups and difficulties, including alcoholism. He gives the impression that he has a very intimate relationship with God and that he has insight to a superspirituality. He regularly meditates and reports having many visions and encounters with God. He is an extremely gifted writer who is able to tug at the emotions of the reader while at the same time introducing ideas that the reader would immediately reject if they were not cloaked under this emotional blanket.

“He promises readers that if they apply his teaching they too will gain this same intimacy with God as well as freedom from fear, guilt, and psychological hang-ups and difficulties. This is very attractive. Manning’s prescription to achieve this is not by traditional prayer and by the reading and application of the Bible. Rather, the means to this end is a mixture of Eastern mysticism, psychology, the New Age Movement, liberation theology, Catholicism, and Protestantism. This mixture will not deliver intimacy with God. It no doubt will lead to special feelings and experiences. Those practicing Manning’s methods will likely feel closer to God. However, in the process they will actually move away from Him as a result of a counterfeit spirituality” (“What Is Contemplative Spirituality and Why Is It Dangerous?” <http://www.faithalone.org/journal/1997ii/Caddock.html>).

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